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Tomlinson, Charles E.

Art, life, and co-operation

Manchester

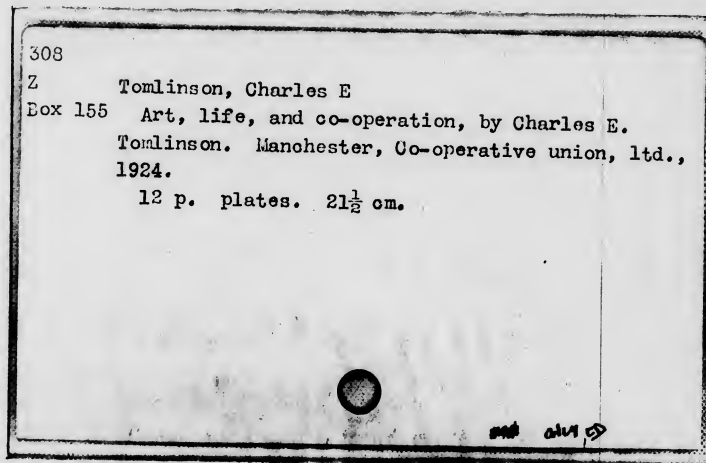
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Art, Life, and Co-operation

BY
CHARLES
E.
TOMLINSON.

PRICE 4d.

MANCHESTER:
THE CO-OPERATIVE UNION LTD.,
HOLYOAKE HOUSE,
HANOVER STREET.

The work of the *artist* is creative, that of the *artisan* is mechanical. The *artificer* is between the two, putting more thought, intelligence, and taste into his work than the artisan, but less of the idealising and creative power than the artist. The sculptor shaping his model in clay, is artificer as well as artist; patient artisans working simply by rule and skill, chisel and polish the stone.—*Funk and Wagnall.*

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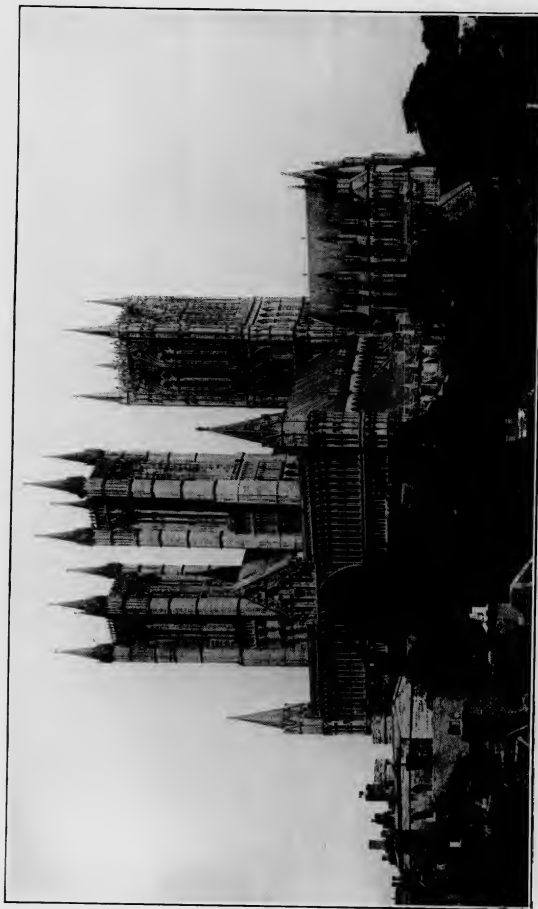
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"[Those] who desire to build up a larger and fuller human life, based upon collective ownership of the means of material existence in a co-operative commonwealth, cannot afford to leave Art out of account, as the great source of joy, the harmonising influence of beauty, the spirit of order and proportion, at once creative and adaptive, capable of lifting men's thoughts on to the loftiest plane, and yet, withal, a sweet familiar and domestic spirit, cheering and comforting, and gladdening the eyes with form and colour, as it sheds its refining influence everywhere."—*Walter Crane*.

Fig 2
Co-operative Union
3.8.24



LINCOLN CATHEDRAL

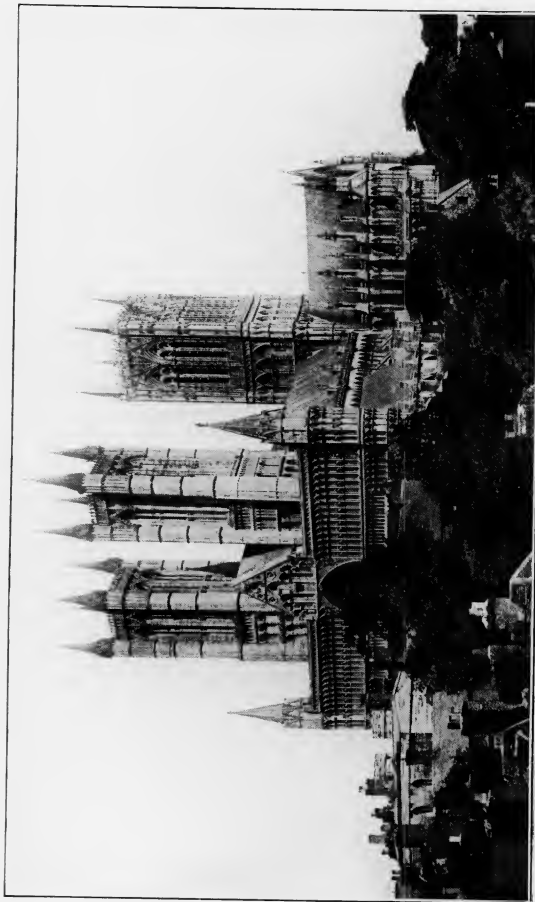
The western front formed part of the original Norman building. The general style is attributed to St. Hugh of Lincoln, the architect and inventor of our national and most excellent Early English style of architecture.

ART, LIFE, AND CO-OPERATION.

WHAT has Art to do with Co-operation? What has Co-operation to do with Art? Have they anything in common?

"Great Art is nothing less than the type of strong and noble life," says Ruskin. "The ideal of Co-operation is, indeed, a noble one, for it means the transformation of human life," says Bishop Stubbs. "Life is the one great fact which Art is always endeavouring to express and illustrate and interpret, and Art is the supreme and final form in which life is always striving to utter itself," to quote Hamilton W. Mabie, an American. Let us substitute the word Co-operation for the word Art, and we get "Life is the one great fact which Co-operation is always endeavouring to express and illustrate and interpret, and Co-operation is the supreme and final form in which life is always striving to utter itself." The truth of each statement is identical.

Art is a spiritual triumph. Co-operation is a triumph over materialism. The ideal of Art is Beauty—that is Perfection, whether in man or material. Art is the history of man's efforts in the past towards that ideal: it is the expression of man's hope of achievement in the present: and it is the inspiration for attainment in the future. The ideal of Co-operation is beauty in living, the perfection of Humanity. Co-operation is the history of man's struggles towards that ideal: it is the greatest political expression of our hope of present-day advancement: and it is the inspiration for the salvation of Humanity. The story of Art is the story of Man's Evolution. The story of Co-operation is the story of Human Progress. Each is a revelation and a revolution—a revelation in the vision of the glorious heritage to which every man and every woman is heir, a revolution



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in the peaceful but uncompromising movement against all that bars the way of the pilgrim's progress to the Land of the Things that are To Be.

Revelation begets revolution; and after revolution comes re-valuation. The veil is drawn—what was hidden and unseen is made open and clear. Old ideas are overthrown—a new light shines,

“And things are not what they seem.”

Thought flows in other directions, and the view-point is changed. The tangled skeins of the world are unravelled and are woven until a design is apparent. The discords of life begin to be lost in a burst of harmony. Man is given a higher value, and a fresh estimate is made as to his place in the scheme of things. He is no longer a cog in the industrial machinery, run according to the cast iron philosophisings of the old school of political economy, but a human being with a soul yearning for the good, the true, and the beautiful. Life is something more than the “one dem'd horrid grind” of Mr. Mantalini, or a period of enslavement “to that dry drudgery at the desk's dead wood” so bemoaned by dear old Charles Lamb. Life is an aspiration to the divine.

Deep down in the heart of man there has always been the instinct for expressing himself in line, form, and colour, the elaboration of which reveals the evolution of the mind behind it all. A sharpened flint and a rude rock served the needs of the prehistoric precursors of human society seeking to record the impressions of their day. The rugged cave became the picture gallery of these primitive people; and on the walls we see to this day, in simple stroke and sometimes colour crude, figures of men and animals that were ever in daily conflict in their struggle for existence. The savage stone scratchings marking the dawn of man's intelligence are as much works of art as are the gorgeous palaces and tombs of Assyria and Egypt and the graceful temples of classic Greece and Rome in the morning of



THE BLIND AND
THE PARALYTIC.

A most poignantly pathetic statue by J. Turcan, and now in the Luxembourg, Paris. It is a most touching example of co-operation—the blind, who cannot see, carries the paralytic, who cannot walk but is able to guide his companion by touch of hand.

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THE POTATO PLANTERS.

A fine picture by Jean François Millet, the master-painter of French peasants and a true idealist, who has made his name and fortune by painting the peasants working together for "our daily bread," with Nature and Man hand in hand.

civilisation, and the magnificent cathedrals of the glorious Gothic in the noonday of our modern life.

The highest art has ever been in the service of Religion—religion in its truest meaning, that is to bind man to something higher, be it a noble thought, a beautiful ideal, the Father of Life, the Great Architect of the Universe, God Himself. The grand monuments of antiquity are silent witnesses to this fact; and still more eloquent evidence is the wonderful wealth of Christs and Madonnas, chants and hymns, and cathedrals and abbeys of the Middle Ages. Art, in practical application to Religion, is worship, or worthship as the word was originally—adoration of, reverence for, something worthy. And all through this worship the underlying principle is service for the Common Good.

Art and Co-operation are two forces working along parallel lines to the goal of perfection. The one is ideal: the other is practical. Each stands for social service. The artistic nature, like the co-operative nature, is sympathetic. It cannot live to itself alone: it must give pleasure and inspiration to others in terms of art. True Art and True Co-operation can only spring from free and voluntary effort; and in their expression they are above nations. They may be, by circumstances of race and country, national in character; but in their essentials and in their ultimate they are international, no frontiers barring their progress, no creed narrowing their scope, no colour blinding their outlook. The empire of Art is world-wide, and Co-operation is enthroned in the great heart of Humanity.

The period of the Middle Ages was when Art and Co-operation reached a high degree of partnership. The co-operative organisations known as Guilds flourished everywhere in Europe; and whether sacred or secular in their expression, their foundation principle was mutual help, social service. One of the most important of these Guilds was the brotherhood of masons, a corporation of artists in stone who gave of the best of their craftsmanship wherever a church or a cathedral was to be built. It is to these mediæval workers that the great masterpieces of ecclesiastical architecture in



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Europe are attributed. One thing is certain, the builders of grand cathedrals and fine abbeys were not as the human machines of our own times, but men fired with the fervour of their art, whose joy of living was in their work, who stamped each stone with the master-mark of their individuality. Tradition has it that the co-operative practice of the stone-workers' art dates back to the old Roman Empire, to the days of the Pharaohs, to the making of the Temple of Solomon, yea, even to the building of the Tower of Babel! The spirit of this fraternity, at least in its aspect of brotherhood and mutual help, survives in the world-wide Order of Freemasonry.

One other example of Art and Co-operation working together in perfect harmony in the Middle Ages was that of the Meistersingers. The earliest lyric poets of Germany were the Minnesingers, the singers of love ditties, the minstrels of chivalry. They were succeeded by the Meistersingers, who were groups of artisans united in guilds or corporations for making and improving the national standard of poetry. The Meistersingers were found in all the principal towns and cities of south and middle Germany; and in their various schools, weavers, shoe-makers, and workers in other trades met in their leisure hours and co-operatively helped to popularise the taste for poetry that holds such high place in German culture.

It has been said that the special function of the Nineteenth Century was to banish the picturesque. Certain it is that the greatest period of Art was in the Middle Ages. The masters and the men of the craft guilds held Labour sacred as the handmaid of Art. A piece of work was then a complete achievement of a man's own effort, an artistic accomplishment, an expression of his individuality. Alas, the artisan is now no longer the devotee of Art, but the slave of Machinery. To-day the brain and the fingers of the craftsman make not "a thing of beauty and a joy for ever" from out a shapeless mass and dedicate it to the service of the people. Everything nowadays is a mechanical creation, an aggregation of standardised parts. Machinery, and not

Man, "is the master of things," Algernon Charles Swinburne notwithstanding. And man suffers in body and soul under the domination of the Frankenstein of his own creation. The mission of Art is to inspire Man to take possession of himself, and the ministry of Co-operation is to help him to do so by teaching him how to become the master of the machine, the commander of his soul.

The Elizabethan Age was the most glorious art period in our island story; in fact, England with her Shakespeare and fellow dramatists, her Spenser and a ring of poets, her Bacon and other philosophers, her school of native music composers who still are masters of the madrigal, was then mistress of the world in matters artistic. The Victorian Age, the other brilliant period in the history of our country, saw the art life of the people sacrificed to the twin gods of Mammon and Machinery, with their profit-making, labour-saving, but soul-destroying doctrines. The baser gold of trade and commerce became the currency of the nation's thought and activities instead of the pure gold of Art.

The reign of Competition was ushered in with the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, and a blight fell on Art. The Nineteenth Century became highly materialistic. The spiritual life of the people, for which all true Art stands, began to revive, however, with the awakening of the new democracy, when voices were heard in the wilderness crying out the way of salvation through Co-operation. Competition truly is death—the death of all the highest motives in man—the annihilation of the soul. Co-operation is life—the preservation of the noblest ideals—the uplifting of man to the heights of the eternal verities.

Competition stands for fraud, deceit, ugliness. Co-operation is the very antithesis of Competition, and so is art with Art, which stands for honesty, truth, and beauty. Art, therefore, has its definite place in the Co-operative Movement; and the importance of the cultivation of art should be recognised in co-operative educational work equally with instruction in the matters of science which concern the more materialistic side of our activities. Our co-operative

comrades in Belgium have set the grand example in this respect. La Maison du Peuple, in rue Joseph Stevens in Brussels, is a wonderful centre of co-operative art and culture. One of the largest theatres in the city is here the home of dramatic productions of works by the world's masters, a small theatre being reserved for choral performances. A remarkable feature of this little theatre is the painting at the back of the stage of a colossal head of Christ, a face beautiful, with eyes luminous and full to overflowing with the great love for Humanity. The long line of letter-boxes tells of the many circles that radiate from here, musical, choral, dramatic, and artistic.

The "Vooruit," the splendid consumers' society in Ghent, however, pays the greatest tribute to the refining influence of Art and the part that it should play in our co-operative life. The "Vooruit"—which means Forward—set aside one of its rooms as a studio to accommodate a well-known artist, one Van Biesbroeck, so that he could devote some of his abilities to giving powerful, telling life-form to the miseries and the sufferings, the hopes and the aspirations of the sons and daughters of toil in vigorous, sympathetic statuary; and warmth and colour to the dreams of the working classes in beautiful mural paintings, which are to be found all over the adjoining block for social resort called "Ons Huis"—Our House. Cartoons, from time to time, are shown outside the building, in bold outline, to tell to the passers-by the message of Co-operation so that he who runs may see and understand. International fame has been achieved by the son of this artist under co-operative ægis, for one of his masterpieces in bronze has been honoured by a place at the entrance to one of the finest palaces of Art in the world, the Luxembourg in Paris.

Art and Co-operation, hand-in-hand, also flourish in Italy. The "Umanitaria" of Milan is doing a truly magnificent work in opening up the many avenues of Art to the masses. An entirely democratic institution, in which the great co-operative societies of Milan take an active interest, it was founded, amongst other purposes, to procure, through



LOUVAIN TOWN HALL.

One of the richest and most elaborate gems of Gothic architecture in the world. A great treasure of Belgium, it was begun in 1448, and finished in 1469 by M. de Lyons, master mason of Louvain. Some 250 statues ornament the towers and the façades.

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AN ITALIAN CASKET.

A truly beautiful specimen of real co-operative art. It was made by the Guild of Handicrafts of the Province of Florence, Italy, which was founded in 1913 by four co-operative societies.

the medium of co-operative societies and similar organisations, the betterment of the social conditions of the people, and to promote productive and labouring co-operative societies. One of its most successful enterprises is a School of Art and Handicraft, comprising extremely fine work in designing, painting, metal-work, embroidery, lace-making, &c. There is another inspiring work being done in the handsome Istituto Carducci by the Lake Como, an institution for popular education in the arts, in the welfare of which the local co-operators are concerned.

What are we doing in this, the Mother Country of Co-operation? We know not of any co-operative society that takes under its wing a painter or a sculptor to work for the artistic joy of its members. We know not of any British co-operative society that has a theatre of its own. And we know not one that has given any particular attention to Art, although some co-operators in Glasgow are now taking part in an annual art exhibition in their city. Societies there are in agreeable number that have their own choral or musical circle, and some interest themselves seriously in the drama—the Liverpool Society's Education Committee not only buy tickets at a cheap rate for performances at the theatre, but also for art exhibitions held in the city, organised parties of members being personally introduced to the main points in the pictures by the well-versed curator. The greatest art achievement in our own movement, perhaps, is that of the Co-operative Wholesale Society's Male Voice Choir of Balloon Street, Manchester, whose members are animated by the purest love of art, and whose achievements are of the highest in the musical centres of the country. One looks forward to the day when the Co-operative Wholesale Society's Orchestra will rank equally high in activity, so that the two may take their place worthily at the next grand Co-operative Festival at the Crystal Palace, when the co-operators of this country are sufficiently interested to revive this one-time artistic event of the co-operative year.

One's artistic ambitions for our movement will not be satisfied until Holyoake House is a centre of art inspiration



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as well as of business instruction and propaganda, spreading a knowledge of, and enthusiasm for, art in its many manifestations, through the channels of its summer and week-end schools and of the societies throughout the country which look to it for light and leading; until our Co-operative Wholesale Society, through its architectural and building departments, is recognised as a fount of ideas and designs that shall make our co-operative institutions a delight to the eye of the beholder and a pleasure to all who work and do business there; until our co-operative press pours forth printed page and picture that shall be wholly worthy, in taste and beauty, of the great movement it informs and serves.

Art and Co-operation seek not to make profit, but to bring joy into life. Co-operators! we say we want the best in everything. Let us prove our words. Our home should be a treasury of things beautiful. Let us have the most artistic furniture of co-operative production that our means can afford, instead of the monstrosities in wood and iron that oft encumber our dwellings. Let us make our homes pleasing to the eye with wall-papers of artistic merit and pictures that cheer and inspire. Demand them at the stores! Let us go forth to our work and pleasure clad in garments of taste and style. A co-operative tailor or dress-maker ought to give us as good creations as those of the leading fashion houses. Let our needs for entertainments be ministered unto by means of refinement, and so avoid the horrors of jazz and the banality of the music-hall. Let us keep our lives bright and our memories sweet with festivals, anniversaries, and pageants. Let us make the refreshing influence of art felt not only in our co-operative societies, but in the wider co-operative organisations, our municipalities, so that red brick box dwellings with blue slate lids, in dull, dreary, monotonous array, shall no longer mar our cities; and cinder-hills and rubbish dumps shall be transformed into spots of gladdening grass and whispering trees; and our architecture be a matter of civic pride and communal dignity.

The virtue of co-operation was revealed to us by Robert

Owen; with the twenty-eight poor weavers of Rochdale began the peaceful revolution through co-operation; and, to-day, under the world-wide influence of co-operation, man, both as individual and in the mass, is having a new value set upon him. "Art," says Lavater, "is nothing but the highest sagacity and exertion of Human Nature." Co-operation is the practical means towards that end. The one is æsthetic: the other is ethical. To quote Tennyson—

"Like a piece of art,

All toil should be co-operant to an end."

And that end, we believe with Bishop Fraser of Manchester, "ought to be the welfare, in the highest sense of the word—the physical, moral, social, intellectual, and religious or spiritual well-being of mankind."

The co-operative estimate of humanity means a new outlook on life—on the individual and his relations to the family, to the community, to the nation, and to the world. The Co-operative Movement is a struggle, not against individuals or any class or party, but against a social system based on selfishness and working through competition. Our destiny is the Co-operative Commonwealth, which shall have for foundation sure and strong the freedom of the individual to develop himself, in peace and through industry, for service in the common good. Every man has a natural right to food, to raiment, and to shelter. The co-operative principle is that these common needs shall be satisfied, not by trading for individual profit, but by exchange for mutual benefit. Man shall not for ever batten on his fellow. "Love thy neighbour as thyself" shall one day become the rule of life. Tools and machinery shall then be servants and not masters. When man no longer lusts for private gain, the barrier to right relations between men and between nations will be removed.

Co-operation makes for the right understanding of life, and, through its collective thought, has a culture distinctly its own. And why not an art? "The conscious utterance of thought by speech or action, to any end, is art," according

to Ralph Waldo Emerson. What better medium for an all-embracing effort? The earnest longing for the betterment of humanity, the glowing hope for the progress of the peoples, the fervent faith in the salvation of the world through co-operation, what inspiration is here for poets and painters, musicians and singers, architects and sculptors, orators and dramatists! Hark to the voice of Walt Whitman:—

“Expanding and swift, henceforth,
Elements, breeds, adjustments, turbulent, quick, and
audacious,
A world primal again, vistas of glory incessant, and
branching,
A new race dominating previous ones and grander far,
with new contests,
New politics, new literatures and religions, new inventions
and arts.”

Art and Co-operation, in glorious comradeship, stand for grace in thought, graciousness of speech, and gracefulness in action, and so will make life sweeter and nobler, because animated by that unifying, energising principle,

“Something kindlier, higher, holier—all for each and
each for all.”

The substance of this pamphlet originally
formed part of an address delivered by
the author to the Pioneer Group of
Co-operators in Manchester.

A thing of beauty is a joy for ever,
Its loveliness increases: it will never
Pass into nothingness.—*John Keats.*

There is no other fine art than this—
the passing of a man's soul into the
work of his hands.—*Harry Quilter*

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